

Current Developments



April 2004

From The State Conservationist - *Robert N. Jones*

We recently enjoyed the first day of spring. The sap is rising in the trees and, figuratively speaking, the sap is also rising in our workload. We initiated three special projects through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). We had a tremendous response to the special litter project. We anticipate that the other two programs, water conservation and the invasive species project, will also be beneficial to our clients.

NRCS in Alabama plays a vital role in conserving our land and resources through an array of cooperative efforts, locally led partnerships, and volunteer programs. We're expanding our efforts to reach and assist clients. A new Major Land Resources Area (MLRA) office has been established on the University of Alabama campus in cooperation with the Geological Survey of Alabama. This office will be similar to the MLRA office housed at Alabama A & M. We are also

establishing a work area on the reservation of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians to assist with their needs. As an outreach effort, we have provided training and computer equipment to four key organizations (Wiregrass Farmers Coop, Samson, AL; United Farmers Organization, Forkland, AL; United Christian Community Association, Safford, AL; and the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Atmore, AL) to ensure that underserved customers have access to our programs. With programs and tangible assistance we are working to improve the environment in a cooperative way with the involvement of states, tribes, local communities, and individuals.

I want to say "congratulations" to the Cullman Field Office for winning the National Earth Team Award. It's an honor to have the work of our good folks in Alabama recognized nationally.

Bob

Cullman County Wins National Earth Team Volunteer Award

By Sammy Harris, Cullman County Earth Team Volunteer

The Cullman County SWCD/NRCS Earth Team and district board representatives were presented the NRCS/NACD Earth Team of the Year Award by NRCS Chief Bruce Knight at the NACD Annual Meeting in Waikoloa, Hawaii.

In FY 2003, Cullman County Earth Team Volunteers provided 15,938 hours of assistance to the district and NRCS in the form of clerical work, conservation education, teacher workshops, tours,

(continued page 2)



l-r: Keisha Haney; Judy Hill; Gary Mast, President NACD; Bruce Knight, Chief NRCS; Cherrie Haney; Robert Harbison; E.C. Gibbs; Joan Gibbs; Edwin and Barbara Carter.

the F.A.W.N. program, watershed assessments, and other projects.

One of their main projects was assisting with the conservation efforts at Camp Meadowbrook, a camp used by Scouts, FFA, teachers, church groups, and others. Other projects are:

- conducted conservation education workshops for teachers,
- assisted with tours of local agricultural producers in promoting agriculture and water quality practices,
- helped with school programs and arranged tours and demonstrations,
- helped with the "Wet and Wild" conservation education programs,
- with the help of Conservation Duck, promoted water quality in various watershed projects and distributed education materials at the Cullman County Fair,
- presented to about 1,400 F.A.W.N. students each year,
- assisted in the Adopt a Stream project, with cleanup around Lake Catoma, which is Cullman's public water supply,
- assisted with water monitoring to aid in water quality assessments and to provide data for grant applications, and
- assisted District employees and teachers in training Envirothon teams. Cullman has had a state winner and has advanced to the national competition.

Alabama Chapter of SWCS Plans Set for Annual Meeting

By Jeff Holloway, President, Alabama Chapter of SWCS

The 2004 SWCS Annual Meeting will be held June 2-4, 2004, at the luxurious Grand National Conference Center and Lodge, Opelika, AL. The resort is nestled in 2,000 acres along the award winning Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail and Saughatchee Lake.

This year's theme is "Protecting Our Watershed." The workshop provides high quality technical sessions and a field trip that is relevant to Certified Professionals in Erosion and Sediment Control, Certified Crop Advisors, Professional Engineers, etc. Certificates of training will be available to participants.

Contact the Grand National for reservations at 334-741-9292. The room rate is \$75 per night. Indicate that you are attending the Alabama SWCS Annual Meeting. Deadline for room reservations is May 5, 2004. Reservations made after that deadline are subject to increase at the hotel's discretion.



E-Government Awareness Program

By Julie Best, Public Affairs Specialist

Instead of driving to a Service Center, registered customers have the option to conduct business online with Service Center Agencies in a secure and protected environment via the E-Government Internet site. This option has great possibilities, but what if you don't have access to a computer? NRCS in Alabama took steps to ensure that underserved clients have access to computers to get on-line program information.

To educate and train clients who may not have access to a computer, NRCS purchased computers and data projectors for four groups across the state: Wiregrass Farmers Coop, Samson, AL; United Farmers Organization, Forkland, AL; United Christian Community Association, Safford, AL; and the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Atmore, AL. NRCS also provided computer training to key leaders from each group. These key leaders will serve as trainers for the farm groups they represent. Their charge is to bring in the folks in their communities and expose them to the information that is available via the internet.

According to Andrew Williams, Outreach Liaison, "I will work closely with these groups to determine their needs and to help them get the assistance they need. We want this program to serve as a pilot for other rural communities. Now that the key leaders have been trained, the next step is to develop a training plan for individuals. This needs to be in a computer lab where each person can have hands-on experience."

The vision of this outreach project is to provide an avenue of opportunity for folks who would never have access to these technologies. By providing access to computer equipment, rural farming communities can take advantage of on-line assistance to programs and services.

State Land Judging Event held in Elmore County

By Julie Best, Public Affairs Specialist, NRCS, Auburn, Alabama

Twelve teams from across the state competed in the 2004 State Land Judging Competition in Elmore County on March 15, 2004. State winners included:

- Alma Bryant High School, Mobile County, 1st
- Douglas High School, Marshall County, 2nd
- Horseshoe Bend High School Tallapoosa County 3rd
- Fruitdale High School, Washington County, 4th.

In recognition of 20+ years of dedicated service to the land judging program, a special award in honor of Jerry Johnson (deceased NRCS State Forester) was given to the student scoring highest on the forestry segment of the competition. Mike Hurd, Alma Bryant High School, Mobile County, received the award for scoring 59 out of 60 points



Tim Albritton, NRCS state forester (r) presented Mike Hurd, Alma Bryant HS, Mobile County with a special award for scoring highest on the forestry segment of the land judging competition. NRCS friends of Jerry Johnson sponsored the award in honor and appreciation of his many years of service to the land judging program.



Winners of the State Land Judging were Alma Bryant High School, Mobile County.

A Diversity Awareness Event at Perdido Beach

NRCS in Alabama is hosting a 2-day cultural diversity event at Perdido Beach Resort in Gulf Shores, October 26-27, 2004. Registration will begin at 8:00 a.m. on the 26th, and the meeting begins at 10:00 a.m. Free time is scheduled each evening. The Civil Rights Committee is planning the event and may ask for help from some of you. Let's plan for a great time of training, cultural awareness, and fellowship. Put this date on your calendar. You will be receiving additional information later.

The 2004 Wiregrass Cotton Expo and Equipment Show

was held at the National Peanut Festival in Dothan, AL, in February and featured presentations promoting new products, weed and pest control efforts, research data, and marketing trends. NRCS staffed a booth and made available program materials. According to Bob Goodman, Auburn University Economist, the cotton forecast indicates that farming is getting more efficient. The yield and production of cotton is going up on the same amount of planted land. Not only does the U.S. produce an abundance of cotton, U.S. consumption of cotton products is also high.



Cultural Resources Factor into Farm Bill Program

By Teresa Paglione, Cultural Resource Specialist, Auburn, AL

Historical and archaeological resources on farms enter into the mix of things when a piece of property is being evaluated for the Farm and Ranch Protection Program (FRPP). Robert McCurdy, a DeKalb County landowner with an FRPP application, hopes that aspect of the program will earn him points.

A portion of Mr. McCurdy's property appears to include a main route that the Union army used to get to Lookout Mountain from Chickamauga. In September of 1863, in an effort to flank Braxton Bragg's Army and cut him off from Atlanta, Union General William Rosecrans sent two of his army corps west from Chickamauga, ending up south of Chattanooga behind the cover of Raccoon and Sand Mountains in the Cumberland Plateau. Rosecrans then separated his three army corps and moved into the Valley and Ridge to pursue Bragg. There were hundreds of soldiers, horses, wagons, and

cannons that made encampments in this specific area. McCurdy's land and his neighbor's, Richard Manning (also an FRPP applicant) probably contained dozens of encampments.

McCurdy and I recently met with James Ogden, Historian for the Chickamauga-Chattanooga National Military Park (National Park Service), for more specific information and location data regarding the Union Army's route and the encampments. Since points are awarded for State and National Register cultural resources in the FRPP, with Mr. Ogden's research in this matter, I hope to supply enough information to nominate the cultural resources on

the McCurdy and Manning properties to the State Register of Historic Places (and maybe the National Register of Historic Places), thereby, improving their chances for approval in the next FRPP.



Landowner Robert McCurdy (l) and James Ogden (National Park Service) view trail route.

Horticulture/Landscape Designer Available to Help You!

By Terry Joyner, Cawaco RC&D Council

It's that time of year to begin planning for planting!

- Do you have any city/town beautification projects in mind?
- Does your local Beautification Board have new annual/perennial beds that need to be designed?
- Do you need help with site plans for trees at your park, schools, or other municipal properties?

If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes," then I might be able to help you. I am a professional horticulturist/landscape designer for Cawaco RC&D Council. The Council has provided free Landscape/Horticulture Assistance to city, county, and volunteer groups. I have been in the trade for 11 years and I have many creative ideas to share with you and your community.

When it comes to beautification projects around town, what to plant, who to plant them, and where to get the plants and materials, let me help! Give me a call at 205-264-8462 and let's start looking at upcoming projects or areas to enhance in your community.



Communicating With and About People with Disabilities

By Fay Garner, Disability Special Emphasis Program Manager, Auburn, AL

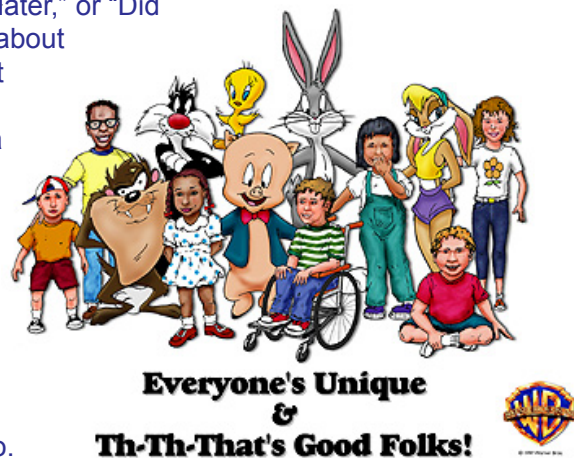
With the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the efforts of many organizations, excellent progress has been made in improving building accessibility and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. A person is said to have a disability if they find it difficult or impossible to perform one or more activities of everyday living. People with disabilities are getting out of their homes more and more. Working and meeting people with a disability is more common than ever. Some people are concerned that they will say the wrong thing when communicating with a person with a disability, or because they do not know what to say, they will say nothing at all. Here is some information I found on the U.S. Department of Labor website that will help us to communicate with and about people with disabilities.

Person First Language

You will always say the right thing when writing or speaking about people with disabilities, if you will just put the person first. Group designations such as "the blind," "the retarded" or "the disabled" are inappropriate because they do not reflect the individuality, equality or dignity of people with disabilities.

Etiquette considered appropriate when interacting with people with disabilities is based primarily on respect and courtesy. Here are tips to help you:

- When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. Even people with limited hand use or those who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
- Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions such as "See you later," or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.
- Always ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.



Examples of positive and negative phrases.

Affirmative Phrases

person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability
person who is blind, person who is visually impaired
person with a disability
person who is deaf
person who is hard of hearing
person who has multiple sclerosis
person with cerebral palsy
person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder
person who uses a wheelchair
person who has muscular dystrophy
person with a physical disability, physically disabled
person unable to speak, uses synthetic speech
person with psychiatric disability
person who is successful, productive

Negative Phrases

retarded; mentally defective
the blind
the disabled; handicapped
the deaf; deaf and dumb
suffers a hearing loss
afflicted by MS
CP victim, afflicted with CP
epileptic
confined or restricted to a wheelchair
stricken by MD
crippled; lame; deformed
dumb; mute
crazy; nuts
has overcome his/her disability; is courageous
(implies courage because of having a disability)

FROM THE FIELD

Coffee County Offers Grazing Conference

by Mike Harris, DC, New Brockton, AL

The Coffee County SWCD in cooperation with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and NRCS hosted a Grazing Seminar. Dr Jim Gerrish, a nationally recognized expert in “forage systems,” was the keynote presenter. For many years he was associated with the University of Missouri’s Forage Systems Research Center. His biography is filled with proof of his successes in many other states that have seen similar challenges to those in Alabama.

Gerrish emphasized that grazing management is an art based on science. Cows intensively graze by nature; only people can intensively manage the process. The basic goal of grazing management is to keep as many acres in the optimum grazing phase as possible. Gerrish spent the day explaining the processes that help accomplish that goal.

Other presenters included NRCS Grazing

Specialist Sid Brantly who provided information on water facilities, fencing, and stream crossings. Dr. Darrell Rankins with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System talked about beef cattle nutrition.

In the New Brockton Field Office, we’ve noticed an increased interest in livestock production in the county. Producers are looking for ways to maximize profits with livestock since the



Dr. Jim Gerrish emphasized that grazing management is an art based on science.

income from peanut production is not what it used to be. The EQIP program is a vehicle we are using with producers to try some new concepts in grazing management. This Grazing Seminar reinforces what we have planned with them in EQIP contracts as well as with conservation operations assistance. The producers who have intensified their grazing management like the results. We plan to repeat the Seminar again next year.

Mobile County Soil Conservation Technician Joyce Nicholas receives Bachelors Degree

By Deb Sloat, Administrative Coordinator, NRCS West Team, Grove Hill

Mobile County Soil Conservation Technician (SCT) Joyce Nicholas received her Bachelors of Science Degree from the University of Mobile in Organizational Management and Leadership Development. Joyce is continuing her education at the University of Florida and is working towards her second BS degree in Turf Science.

Joyce began working with NRCS as an Earth Team Volunteer. She fell in love with what NRCS stands for and our mission and was thrilled when the Mobile County SCT job came open. She applied for the position, was accepted, and started to work in December 2001. Joyce looks forward to a long and productive career with NRCS. She is thankful to the agency for allowing her to take credit leave, annual leave, and work within a flexible schedule in order to continue her education. She was recently promoted to Soil Conservationist in Baldwin County.



Restoring Grasslands For Migratory Songbirds

By Foy Kirkland, DC, Hartselle, AL

In recent years, the Morgan County NRCS has led an effort to re-establish native grasses in the county and has used federal cost-share funds to help 18 landowners transform 550 acres into native grass habitat. They are working with Vulcan Materials and three other industries (BP, 3M, and Nucor Steel), as part of the Migratory Bird Program, to transform 300 acres of wasteland property belonging to the four companies into ideal habitat for declining grassland birds. In this first step of a three-year pilot effort, Vulcan Materials will burn 38 acres of brush to get rid of smaller trees and prepare the land for native grass seeding and hardwood tree plantings to create an ideal habitat for birds. This

effort will benefit the loggerhead shrike, prairie warbler, dickcissel, field sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, eastern meadowlark, northern bobwhite quail, and short-eared owl.

The program will also provide a walking trail, adding another dimension to the North Alabama Birding Trail.

The plan calls for converting fescue and weed fields on 140 acres of Nucor and 114 acres of 3M property to native warm-season grasses. As part of the nature trail, 3M also will plant 8 acres of grass-shrubland habitat and BP will plant 2 acres of native warm-season grasses.

The Migratory Bird Program is not a federal initiative, but was started by an international organization



The population of northern bobwhite quail decreased 65 percent in the past 20 years, according to Quail Unlimited.

aimed at getting large corporations to use vast acres of unused land for wildlife management. Working with the Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC) and the walking trail allows NRCS to be more involved



To create a migratory songbird habitat, NRCS DC Foy Kirkland (l) worked out a plan with Vulcan Materials' wildlife maintenance manager, Murphy Ward, and plant manager, David Leeds.

with the community.

We at NRCS and the WHC want to get more industries involved in this Corporate Campaign for Migratory Bird Conservation, which began in 2002. We look forward to a productive corporate-sponsored partnership in this effort.

RC&D News

ALA-TOM RC&D Council --

presented a grant to the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma for an oral history preservation project. The museum has hundreds of VCR tapes of

oral (video) history that are disintegrating. The grant is matched by the Alabama Power Co. Foundation. The grant will allow all existing VCR tapes to be copied onto DVDs. The grant will also purchase digital camcorders and a computer with a DVD burner to preserve future tapes.

Northwest RC&D Council --

welcomes Charlie Meek as the new Coordinator. Charlie served as coordinator of the Oconee River RC&D Council in Georgia from 1996-2004.

The Tri-State Rabbit Growers Association will be hosting a Field Day on June 5th at Alabama A&M at Huntsville, AL. This event will be an effort of numerous groups, agencies and Universities along with Northwest RC&D Council.

The Council is also planning a fund raiser for the Wheels To Work Program in June.

Wiregrass RC&D Council --

A Rabbit Production meeting will be held in Phenix City on April 22nd. Commercial Rabbit Production is about to be adopted by the State RC&D Association as a state-wide project.



Retiree News By Jesse Bush

The spring retirees meeting will be in Prattville April 22-23, 2004. An interesting program has been arranged for Friday beginning at 10:00 a.m. In addition to visiting with former co-workers, we will hear updates from the Office of Water Resources (ADECA) regarding the status of "Water War" negotiations with Georgia, Florida, and the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Jimmy Chaffin, NRCS State Administrative Officer, will brief us on current NRCS programs.

Thursday night lodging is at the Hampton Inn and the meeting on Friday is at O'Charley's Restaurant, both located at Exit 179 on I-65 (Cobb's Ford Road Exit).

One of our retirees, **Clifford Jones**, is obviously making a difference in his community. The AU College of Agriculture presented its first Humanitarian Award to Cliff during the 2004 African-American Legacy Program sponsored by the college's Cultural



Diversity Committee. The award recognizes Cliff for his involvement in and contributions to the community as a minister and as a conservation leader. Cliff served part-time as a Baptist minister at churches in Auburn, Salem, and Opelika during his 28-year career with SCS/NRCS. He has been the full-time pastor of the Greater Peace Missionary Baptist Church in Opelika since retiring in 1997.

We were gratified to learn that the late **Miles and Mary Stephen's** Estate gave Auburn University a posthumous \$2.1 million gift to endow scholarships for students in financial need. Interest from the fund should amount to about \$100,000 for scholarships each year. Miles was an SCS Soil Scientist and a 1927 graduate of AU. He retired as State Soil Scientist in 1965 and died in 1998. Mary was a former Auburn High School teacher and also worked in the Registrar's office at AU.

We are saddened to report the deaths of two retirees since our last newsletter:

Robert E. (Bob) Waters died January 29 at the age of 81. He was a wildlife biologist with SCS and worked for a number of years with the State Conservation Department prior to working with SCS.

Marlyn F. (Sonny) Hester died February 14 at the age of 76. He served as special projects engineer and area engineering specialist at a number of locations in Alabama.

We would like to add your name and email address to our list so we can keep you informed of news about retirees. Contact us at: cgbush@mindspring.com.

Personnel

Accessions

Autry Burns, Soil Conservation Technician, Rainsville, AL
Anne Cross, Soil Conservationist, Brewton, AL
Gwendolyn Lewis, District Conservationist, Tuskegee, AL
Zamir Libohova, Soil Scientist, Tuscaloosa, AL
Ramon Ortiz-Rodriguez, Soil Conservationist, Rainsville, AL
Stephon Thomas, Soil Scientist, Huntsville, AL

Promotions

Zona Beaty, District Conservationist, Tuskegee, AL to Resource Conservationist, Auburn, AL
Renea Dyer, Soil Conservationist, Florence, AL
Pamela Fleming, Soil Conservation Technician, Carrollton, AL
Judy Hill, District Conservationist, Cullman, AL to ASTC (FO) North, Decatur, AL
Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservation Technician, Mobile, AL
Walker Williams, Soil Conservationist, Rainsville, AL
Julie Yates, Program Analyst, Auburn, AL

Reassignments

Mickey Barton, Civil Engineering Technician, Greensboro, AL to Tuscaloosa, AL
Renea Dyer, Soil Conservationist, Andalusia, AL to Florence, AL
Jason Gardner, Soil Conservationist, Cullman, AL to District Conservationist, Opelika, AL
Jesse Hall, Civil Engineering Technician, Oxford, AL to Anniston, AL
Wade Hill, Soil Conservationist, Geneva, AL to Cullman, AL
Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservation Technician, Mobile, AL to Soil Conservationist, Bay Minette, AL
Walker Williams, Soil Conservationist, Rainsville, AL to Evergreen, AL
Jennifer Wells, Soil Conservationist, Dothan, AL to Geneva, AL

Transfers In:

Joe Gardinski, Cartographer, Joint Warfare Analysis Center, Dahlgren, VA, to Cartographer, MLRA Soil Survey Office, Huntsville, AL
Charlie Meek, RC&D Coordinator, NRCS, Watkinsville, GA to RC&D Coordinator, Tuscumbia, AL

Resignations

Michael Hildred, Soil Conservation Technician, Anniston, AL

Retirements

Tom Hughes, ASTC, Auburn, AL



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